

# Response to Ofcom Consultation: Self help TV relays & digital switchover



## **GTech Surveys Background -**

GTech Surveys Ltd ([www.gtechsurveys.com](http://www.gtechsurveys.com)) is an independent, UK based RF survey company specializing in broadcast (radio and television) survey products. One of our main activities involves conducting pre and post construction television reception impact surveys, which are usually required by local planning authorities or by project planners to complete EIA studies for large construction projects.

We also support broadcasters with additional survey resource, have the ability to undertake 10m AGL TV reception survey work and can independently verify digital and analogue UHF transmitter coverage with our survey vehicles.

## **General Comments -**

During numerous field surveys, we have identified many instances where isolated communities have solely relied on self-help systems to receive terrestrial television services. Even with the availability of more affordable digital satellite receiving systems, interest in those seems low and residents have often objected to the extra metal work (and cost) required for such systems. Additionally, residents have often demonstrated little technical understanding of any of the systems in place or were available to them.

It is likely that after DSO there will remain (and possibly be additional) unserved areas which self-help relays could be one solution. Other solutions may exist such as cable, satellite and possibly broadband, but their availability is location dependant and each affected location would require feasibility studies and site visits to determine this.

As the number of households that rely on such systems seems to be currently unknown, steps should be taken now to determine the operational status of each relay and also to determine the availability of the other services (as mentioned above) in the relay's service area. By having this knowledge, residents could be aided by providing them up to date and useful information about how DSO will affect them and their self-help system, what else is currently available for them and what the likely cost impact could be. On this last point of cost, as the DSO media campaign continues, people will be more aware of the government help available to elderly viewers and this raises the possibility of confusion with how these relays could be funded.

## **Consultation Questions**

**Question 1:** Do you agree with Ofcom's proposal to license digital self helps for areas currently served by a self-help relay, and how we propose to make available licences? If not, please give your reasons.

It is likely that there will be a need for such systems post DSO in some areas that currently have a self-help relay in operation. However, the DTT platform is more resilient to multipath interference and subsequently, a replacement relay may not be required if post DSO DTT services serve the area well.

The operational status of all relays and the availability of other broadcast services in the local area should be investigated in a timely fashion, so valid information is available for the owners and Ofcom as DSO approaches.

The same current licensing bodies should continue this work to avoid public confusion.

**Question 2:** Do you agree with Ofcom's proposal to license digital self helps for areas not currently served by a self-help relay, and how we propose to make available licences? If not, please give your reasons.

Some areas currently served by analogue may not have service coverage post DSO. Residents in any areas where this occurs (or possibly may do?) should be made aware of the 'self-help scheme' and any other locally available services. It would be advisable to investigate these areas to determine the availability of all services and the number of households that may be affected.

**Question 3:** Do you agree with how Ofcom proposes to deal with the frequency planning for self-help relays? If not, please give your reasons.

Post DSO, should an existing relay need replacing or should a new one be required, after initial investigations, the same frequency planning procedures should apply.

**Question 4:** Do you agree with Ofcom's proposed fee for WTA licences for self help relays? If not, please give your reasons.

Due to the high combined costs of the relay equipment and domestic receiving equipment for smaller communities, any fees should be modest. Should the majority of the relay's users fall into the age category that warrants additional government DSO help, discounted costs would have to apply or additional help must be offered.